

MUSCODA COMMUNITY
(Muscode Village)
Birmingham Industrial District
Bessemer vic.
Jefferson County
Alabama

HAER No. AL-90

HAER
ALA
37-BES.V
7-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127

MUSCODA RED ORE MINING COMMUNITY
(Muscoda Community)
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ADDENDUM TO:
MUSCODA COMMUNITY
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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ADDENDUM TO
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Location: On the northern and southern slopes of Red Mountain at Readers Gap, to the east and west of AL 150. Located in the Bessemer vicinity, Jefferson County Alabama. To reach Muscoda from Bessemer, take 19th Street south up Red Mountain to Holbrook Avenue and turn right on Holbrook Avenue to Minnesota Avenue. The mining community is on both sides of AL 150. The community is also accessible from Club House Road, just south of Fairfax Avenue.

Date of Construction: 1902-1909, 1917-1918

Builder/Engineer/Architect: TCI Land Department

Present Owner: Multiple private

Present Condition: Houses and community facilities that remain have been generally well-maintained and little altered through the years. Addison Elementary School, until quite recently the last remaining TCI school still operating as a school, remains vacant.

Significance: The Muscoda Red Ore Mining Community includes the finest concentration of worker housing and company-built community facilities in the District. Two schools, a church, medical dispensary, doctor's house and teachers' cottages document company-operated social welfare programs of the 1910s and 1920s. The community also reveals a diversity of building types which reflects the hierarchy of the labor force and a clearly delineated, geographically separated racial organization.

Project Information: This report is based upon written documentation donated by the Birmingham Historical Society, reformatted to HABS/HAER guidelines.

DESCRIPTION

The Muscoda community is situated along the crest and slopes of Red Mountain just south of Bessemer and just north of TCI's former red ore mines, the largest in the Birmingham District. The community is composed of several distinctive sections including a row of seven two-story frame superintendent residences along Minnesota Avenue at the crest of the mountain. Along and to the south of Minnesota Avenue and nearest the mine headquarters is a section of 16 mining foremen's residences. To the west across Readers Gap is a section of 115 four-room square top and bungalow style worker houses, originally divided into black and white sections. As mining operations expanded during World War I this area housed white miners and additional company housing for blacks was built on the southern slopes of Red Mountain in geographically separated sections known as "New Camp" and "New (or Borah) Village." New Village includes 69 four-room and six-room frame duplexes, known locally as "double two room" and "double three room" houses.

The Muscoda community still includes numerous company-built community facilities, including two schools (one for blacks and one for whites), a teachers' cottage, a Social Science Building now a residence, a church, a doctor's house and a medical dispensary (now a church). Five brick mine headquarters buildings also remain as well as substantial foundation materials at Muscoda mine sites on the southern slope of Red Mountain. A power house and head frame for the mine hoist also remain.

Significant Structures and Groups of Structures Remaining at Muscoda include the following:

Superintendents' Houses (1902)

HAER No. AL-9

Architect: Wheelock and Wheelock

Contractor: C. D. Ratliffe

1405-1509 Minnesota Avenue

Foremen Houses (1909)

1309-1403 Minnesota Avenue

1402-1510 Avenue I

Worker Houses (1902-1903)

Architect: Wheelock and Wheelock

TCI Associate John A. Baird

Avenues I, J, H and G

Worker Houses (1906-1907, 1917-1918)

Avenues G, H and I

New Camp (1913)

New Avenue, west of AL 150

New (Borah) Village (1917-1918)

Borah and Gary Avenues, east of AL 150

TCI White Schoolhouse-Bessemer Baptist Association (c. 1914)

Fairfax Avenue (JC 18) at AL 150

TCI Black Schoolhouse-Addison Elementary School (1914)

HAER No. AL-95

413 Morgan Road

Until quite recently, the last remaining TCI school still operating as a school.

Starlite Baptist Church

HAER No. AL-89

A TCI-built church

AL 150 at Morgan Road

Muscoda Mine Headquarters (1903, 1940)

Just south of Minnesota Avenue, to east of AL 150

The five brick structures at this site served as headquarters for the Muscoda mines, TCI's largest red ore mining operations in the District. The best concentration of ore mining headquarters facilities in the District, they include a 1903 brick supply house, a 1903 brick shop building, a 1940 safety hall, an electrical shop and a one-story brick privy and bathhouse with separate entrances for white and black miners. Several industrial enterprises occupy the site.

Muscoda Red Ore Mines Nos. 5 & No. 6

Southern slope of Red Mountain at Muscoda

The sites contain foundation materials scattered over more than 20 acres. Included are hoist foundations, a boiler stack, large foundation remnants, smaller piers, wall and other features which reveal the progressions of mining practice in the Red Mountain mining district from surface, out crop trenches to steam and electrically powered hoist assisted operations.

Pyne Mine

HAER No. AL-28

To east of AL 150, four miles south of Bessemer

At this five acre site, originally part of the Muscoda mines, the 40' steel headframe and brick powerhouse are still standing.

Inside the power house, foundations for equipment remain. One of only two shaft mines in the District, Pyne, one of the largest red ore mines in the nation, operated until 1971.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In 1899, TCI purchased existing mining operations at Muscoda. In 1901, Don Bacon, former president of a major Minnesota red ore mining firm, became president of TCI. Bacon and many of his Minnesota associates and their families moved to Birmingham. These men expanded and improved the Muscoda Mines, which became and remained through the 1950s the largest in the Birmingham District. To house the new mine management, Birmingham's leading architectural firm, Wheelock and Wheelock, designed two-story Queen Anne-style frame houses which were built by Birmingham contractor C. D. Ratliffe.

In 1902 and 1903, TCI also built 115 square-top worker houses across Readers Gap for miners and their families. Wheelock, Joy and Wheelock provided the plans and Ratliffe served as contractor. TCI's John A. Baird supervised construction. The pyramidal roof cottage design, best known locally as the four-room square top, was well adapted to the southern climate and needs of an industrial work force. With two front doors, it could be rented to one or two families. The design proved so popular, it became the most common housing form in TCI and other industrial company camps throughout the Birmingham District rather than the two-room cottage, the standard for other southern mining communities. In 1907 and 1908, under Baird's supervision as head of the land department, TCI constructed additional square-top houses at Muscoda in 1909 built a second group of foremen's houses. In 1913 the company relocated black miners originally housed along Avenue I to "New Camp," a two-street village of 115 two and three-room frame houses on the southern slope of Red Mountain. In 1917 and 1918, duplex housing was built in the older sections and in another settlement called "New" or "Borah Village." Baird designed and supervised these building efforts, as well as maintenance of the structures. By the 1920s, an estimated 3,500 persons lived at Muscoda.

Throughout the 1910s, TCI erected numerous community facilities. The two-story brick Georgian Revival white miners' clubhouse featured a dance hall and pool. By 1914, TCI had built two substantial schoolhouses (a brick one for whites and a frame structure for blacks), a cottage for nine resident teachers, a social science building for cooking and sewing classes, a medical dispensary and doctor's house. Until the Depression, they were generously staffed by TCI Division of Social Science employees under the direction of Dr. Winifred Collins, a nationally-recognized educator trained in the Chicago schools of social work.

Sources Consulted

White, Marjorie, The Birmingham District, pp. 202-206

Birmingham Historical Society, Industrial Community Files,
Muscodas

Auburn University School of Architecture Urban Design Studio
Inventory Project, Notebook and Files, Fall 1991-Winter 1992